

Enhancing Lives by Improving Food Systems

The Center for Rural Affairs (CfRA) is a non-profit organization located in Lyons, Nebraska whose mission is to foster social and economic justice, while establishing strong rural communities by creating genuine opportunity for rural America.

Since 2011, CfRA has been engaged in a long-term project to help Native American communities revitalize their local economies. CfRA has expanded its geographic coverage over the years, from the Santee Sioux community in Santee, NE to also include the Omaha community in Macy and Walthill, NE. Throughout the past several years these tribal communities have faced several challenges. Transportation options are limited, unemployment is high, and the median household income is low. To help combat these issues and increase the quality of life in these rural communities, USDA Rural Development has partnered with and has awarded CfRA nearly \$600,000 in five rounds of funding through USDA's Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) and Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) programs.



Woyute Wash'te (Good Food) Basket promotion displaying a typical week's food delivery.

The funding provided training and technical assistance in agriculture production, value-added and organic farming techniques, business skills and marketing training for both artisans and farmers beginning to sell at farmers markets, and the establishment of farmers markets in Macy, Santee, and Walthill, NE.

CfRA has expanded its business targets from food production to food preparation and other value-added home-based businesses. It has expanded its sales formats from farmers market to weekly distribution systems. In June 2012, the Santee Farmers Market opened its doors showcasing 16 vendors. Most were first-time sellers, using the skills they learned from the educational sessions. The market ran for 16 consecutive Saturdays and by the last day of the market, more than 400 shoppers had visited the market. By 2014 CfRA started the fresh food basket program, which has been very successful, with five new garden businesses selling \$300/week to 30 customers for five months.

CfRA's success stems from targeting its approach to fit the needs and culture of the participants and adapting activities to best serve each tribal community. The 2016 project will build off its past project and is expected to expand further and assist even more new entrepreneurs, including artists. Viable, sustainable food and art businesses are critical to improving the local economies within Santee Sioux and Omaha Communities. In 2016, CfRA is projected to work with 27 food and art entrepreneurs and create or support 30 jobs in Macy, Santee, and Walthill, NE.

Obligation Amount: \$594,431.00 (Native American Rural Business Enterprise Grant and Native American Rural Business Development Grant)

Date of Obligation: FY 2011, FY 2013, and FY 2014 (RBEG). FY 2015 and FY 2016 (RBDG)

Congressional District: Fortenberry 01 and Smith 03; Senators Fischer and Sasse

Partners: Omaha and Santee Sioux Tribes of Nebraska

Demographics: Knox and Thurston County

Impact: Expanding sales, income, and entrepreneurship opportunities for food, art, and other small businesses in the Santee Sioux and Omaha Native American Communities in Macy, Santee, and Walthill, Nebraska.
